

# DIAMOND DICK JR.

THE BOYS BEST WEEKLY

Issued Weekly—By Subscription, \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office by STREET & SMITH

No. 128.

Price Five Cents.

## DIAMOND DICK JR'S FLASHING FIRE

OR A WING SHOT AND ALL HANDS UP.



BY  
W. B. LAWSON.

AS THEY REACHED THE BRIDGE A BULLET HIT THE HORSE AND BERTIE WAS THROWN HEAVILY.

# Diamond Dick, Jr.

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## Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, Flashing Fire

OR,

## A WING SHOT AND ALL HANDS UP

By W. B. LAWSON

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE KETTLE BOILS OVER.

Freeze Out had recovered its equipoise after exciting times that had stirred the town of late.

A bright and beautiful morning dawned upon the neat town that nestled in the gulch bottom, and under the smile of the sun it was hard to imagine any evil in such a place.

But evil was there, nevertheless, or was hovering near, and in spite of calm appearances, the town was on its guard against trouble, for trouble was pending. Just what it was, and what had gone before, let the following pages disclose in order.

Mr. Abram Warren, banker, was in his banking office shortly after the opening hour, and was busy at his desk beginning the business of the day. His two clerks were at their places, and in two corners of the room, where

they commanded a view of the whole office, were two men whose business did not appear at first glance.

But their business can be stated in a few words. They were armed, and were there on guard to protect the banker and his interests.

Besides being a banker, Mr. Warren was also a mine owner.

Presently a young man entered the office.

He was known, the clerks spoke to him as he came in, and he went at once to Mr. Warren's private corner.

Mr. Warren's corner was enclosed in partitions about eight feet high, in which was a door with a ground glass panel on which was the word Private.

The caller was Mr. Phil Norris, assistant superintendent of Mr. Warren's mines, and as such he had the entree to the banker's office at any and all times, without formality.

As he entered the partitioned apartment, Mr. Warren looked up.

"You, Norris?" he greeted.

"Yes, sir," was the serious response.

The young man sat down at once, and the banker faced around.

"Why, what's the matter, Norris?" he asked. "You look as glum as an undertaker this morning."

"Then my looks don't belie my feelings, Mr. Warren," was the return.

"Something wrong at the mines this morning?"

"No, no; the mines are all right; this is a private matter, and I want to speak to you about it."

"All right, my boy, speak away."

"It is about Nellie."

"My daughter—ah!"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, sir, you spoke about her once before and I gave you my permission. If you can hit it off right with the young lady, I'm willing."

"Yes, yes; I know; but it is something more."

"Then you'll have to explain."

Mr. Warren took off his glasses and settled back in his chair to hear what Norris had to say.

"A few days ago, Mr. Warren, you took a young sport into your house under the guise of a nephew, calling him Mr. Bertie Warren, and saying that he was from the East."

"Yes, that's so, as everybody knows."

"It now turns out that his true name is Wade, and that he is known as Diamond Dick, Jr."

"That's correct."

"Well, you did me an injury, Mr. Warren."

"An injury?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Let me further explain. You introduced

this fellow to me as your nephew without taking me into your confidence, leaving me to find out the truth for myself. You had brought him here to hunt down the outlaw known as Hornet Hugh, and to rid you of an enemy."

"Exactly; and it was his own request to remain incog."

"Very good; but you could have trusted me, could you not?"

"What are you driving at?"

"Taking him to be your nephew, I saw nothing in the attentions your daughter bestowed upon him, and, of course, could not protest. When the truth came to be known, then I did protest, but it was too late. Are you aware, sir, that your daughter is in love with this nobody, this adventurer? And are you aware that he has encouraged it?"

The banker looked both pained and surprised.

"I was not aware of it, Mr. Norris," he said. "But are you not a little harsh in your choice of epithets—nobody, adventurer?"

"Is he anything more or better? What do you know about him, anyhow, Mr. Warren?"

"He was recommended to me by no less a personage than the Governor of one of the States, and I have the utmost confidence in him. Furthermore, I believe him to be a gentleman."

"He is not proving himself such, to my way of thinking."

"What is more, Mr. Norris, he saved the life of my little girl, and later saved my own life, and I am under every obligation to him. My house is his as long as he cares to remain as my guest, and when he is ready to go I shall urge him to stay longer."

Mr. Warren spoke in a firm tone, plainly showing that he resented the attack that had been made.

"But, sir, he is treacherous—that is, underhanded with you. He is winning the affec-

tion of your daughter, perhaps with no good intention—”

“Mr. Norris, not another word! I will never believe it of him! You are jealous, and are seeing things magnified! Nellie is thankful for the great services he has rendered—”

“And loves him, to my hurt. Mr. Warren, I hoped to make your daughter my wife, but now—”

“And I hoped to see the union, Philip, as I have told you.”

“But now another has come between me and the object of my love, and it is hopeless. Mr. Warren, if your daughter is to marry me, that man must leave the house at once—”

“Zounds! You dictate to me as to who must leave my house! Why, sir, your jealousy has made you mad! If you can win my daughter, well and good; if you can not, then an end of it. I told you before that I left it all to Nellie, and I tell you so again!”

“Then you have no sympathy to express—”

“Are you a baby? Go in and win, young man; go in and win!”

“But, I have your approval, sir, and it is your duty to use your influence in my behalf.”

“I have done that already; I shall do no more. It rests between you and Nell, and if she won’t have you, I can’t help your case any. She’ll despise you if she hears you whining.”

“But I am not whining; I am protesting as a man who defends his rights, sir. I am an accepted suitor for your daughter’s hand, and—”

“And having done all I can for you, I must refer you to Nell.”

And the banker turned to his desk.

Norris bit his lip, said a few words in more friendly tone, and left the office.

But there was a dark cloud upon his brow,

and muttered curses fell from his lips as he bent his steps in the direction of the Warren residence.

He was admitted at once, being on familiar footing there, and he inquired for Miss Warren, saying that he wanted to see her in a hurry on a matter of importance, and she soon joined him.

She found him pacing the floor of the library.

“You want to see me, Philip?” she asked.

“Yes, Nell, I want to see you,” and he faced her abruptly.

The expression of his face told her what was coming, and she slightly paled.

“What do you want?” in a low tone.

“I want you to be my wife—I have come to ask you for the last time. I have your father’s consent, and it only remains for you to accept my offer—”

“Which I can never do, Phil Norris. I have told you that before. I told you so the last time you urged me, and in such a way that I thought you could not fail to understand.”

“It is because that fellow has come between—”

“Sir!”

“That fellow—”

“Whom do you mean?” with indignation.

“Your so-called cousin, now called Diamond Dick, Jr.; the handsome adventurer—”

“Mr. Norris! I will not hear Mr. Wade maligned! He is a gentleman, or has been such in his conduct toward me, and you shall not speak of him so in my hearing!”

“But it is the truth, he has come between us.”

“He has not! I refused you firmly before I ever saw or heard of Mr. Wade!”

“Ah! Then he is the favored suitor now, I take it.”

“You have no right to infer anything, sir. Mr. Wade has rendered us great services,

and naturally I feel deeply grateful to him."

"No doubt, no doubt; so grateful, in fact, that you love—"

"I forbid your words!"

"But I am here to utter them, and will do so. I have your father's permission to speak."

The girl believed him and bowed her head, biting her lip as she did so, and her face was almost as pale as lifeless marble.

"Then have it over and done with quickly," she said the next moment.

"Will you marry me?"

"Never!"

"Why?"

"It was because I did not love you; it is now because I despise you and almost hate you!"

This was said with fine scorn, and the face of her hearer blanched.

"It is because you love this stranger! It is because he has come between us! But mark my words, you shall never wed him!"

The young woman smiled in a forced manner.

"You are certainly crazy, Mr. Norris," she said. "You are taking my showing of gratitude toward him for love, I fear. Ha! ha! It is almost ridiculous, truly!"

"I am not blind, Nell Warren! I know you too well to be mistaken in what I have seen!"

"But you are mistaken, this time."

"I know that I am not! And, what is more, I'll ruin your happiness unless you here and now promise that you will marry me!"

He took a step toward her, and she recoiled from him with fear.

"Another enemy!" she gasped. "An enemy the same as papa has had for years! Mr. Norris, I cannot believe it of you; you are not rational; you will offer me apology when you become yourself—"

"I am myself now! Say that you will, and I'll be your slave; deny me, and, by heavens! I will not be accountable for what I may do!"

He sprang forward and seized her wrist with a fierce grip.

She gave a scream.

The front door had just opened, admitting Diamond Dick, Jr.

He was just in from the hills, whither he had been with a posse of men in search of the outlaws.

As he closed the door he heard the cry, and a few running strides carried him to the door of the library, from which direction the cry had come.

He flung open the door and leaped into the room, a gun in hand, but he was just too late to be the hero of the moment, save as he came in to back up another hero there ahead of him.

At the girl's cry, Hop Wah the Mascot, one of Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, noble aides, and who had of late been playing the part of body guard to the young lady, leaped out of a corner where a curtain had partly concealed him, with a gun aimed at the fellow.

"Lettee go, dam quickee!" he cried. "If don't, me lettee go and blow dam head off!"

He was not profane purposely; he was emphatic.

And that was the instant the door opened and Diamond Dick, Jr., leaped into the room.

"Release that lady!" he thundered, and Norris fell back, his face like death. In fact, he had been about to recoil under the orders of the Mascot. "And now, sir, what means this scene?"

"Let me deal with him now, please," said the young woman, in calm anger. "Philip Norris, there is the door! Take your leave instantly, and never set foot in this house again! I speak with authority, for my father would second the command if he were here!"

## CHAPTER II.

## DIAMOND DICK, JR., SHOT!

Diamond Dick, Jr., held himself in readiness.

If the fellow did not comply promptly, he meant to assist him a little.

But the man slunk to the door, under the young woman's scorning look and stinging words, and opened it.

"Very well, I go," he said, bitterly, "but remember what I have said. "And you," to Bertie, "you have robbed me of all happiness, so beware of me!"

"Not easy to rob you of a thing you never possessed," said Bertie, sharply. "This is no time nor place to threaten me; if you want to see me I'll be at your service anywhere."

"And this is the friendship you professed."

"It is you who have broken it, so don't squeal. And now you'd better hasten your departure."

"Allee samee that light," chimed in the Mascot, who still had his gun in hand. "On'y fol boss, you been gone long while ago, you bettee!"

"I go," said Norris to Bertie, "but you will hear from me again, I warn you. And you, Nell Warren, remember what I have said! I'll ruin your happiness before you taste it!"

Bertie made a move toward him, and the fellow closed the door and his hasty steps were heard along the hall.

Just as Bertie opened the door, the front door closed with a bang.

Norris was gone.

"Well, that fellow has shown his colors now," Bertie observed, as he turned back into the room. "The poor fool ought to know what he is up against, however."

"Allee samee him findee out, you bettee!" cried the Mascot, putting away his revolver.

"Me all leady to plunkee hole in him, you no comee, sure pop! Makee bely sick, if had, bettee life! Hi-yi! Bettel not come foolee lound here!"

"You did well, Hop, sure enough," said Bertie. "But we'll excuse you now for awhile."

"All light; me no use when you come lound."

And with a grin, the young Chinee ducked his head and went out.

"He has proved his worth, sure enough," said the young woman. "I was not aware that he was on hand."

"He was only obeying orders," said Bertie. "Lucky that he was here, for I might not have come for a long time yet. It was by mere chance, almost, that I arrived when I did."

"And no telling to what length that villain might have gone!" cried the girl, in fright. "I believe that he is really insane."

"With jealousy, yes."

"And without reason, too!"

"I'm not so sure about that, little girl."

"But I had refused him before ever I heard of you, Bertie."

"Yes, that is true; but he loves you, and he is not blind to your secret."

"But we understand each other, I am sure. You have warned me not to fall in love, so this is only friendship."

"And a nice kind of friendship, truly, little one," as he took her into his embrace. "I warned you because I did not want to stand in Mr. Norris' way, you see."

"I understand, and it was kind of you; but that does not alter the fact that——"

"That what, sweet one?"

"That I do love you—there! I loved you the first moment I saw you!"

"Well, I am proud to know it, I'm sure; and I love you, too; but I'm not in the market matrimonial."

"That is all understood, Bertie; you told me frankly, when you saw that I loved you; we understand each other perfectly, I think."

"Perfectly, little girl."

Their lips met, and they then took seats.

"Well, where have you been, and what did you discover?" the girl made inquiry, as she smoothed her hair with her hands and tried to reduce the flush of her cheeks.

Pale in the presence of Phil Norris, she was now rosy enough in the presence of Diamond Dick, Jr.

"I have been out trying to get at Hornet Hugh and his band, as you know," Bertie responded. "As to what we discovered, it was little or nothing. They are in a place where they simply cannot be reached, and yet they seem to have a means of egress."

"Tell me all about it, please."

"Why, you know all about it—that is, all that has gone before—"

"But I so much like to hear you talk, Bertie. It has a charm for me, so please tell me everything."

"If I do, I'll make it short and to the point, for I'd rather let my voice be heard talking about something else when talking to you."

"Oh, well, you can talk about other things, too."

"It's a bargain, then. Well, you know we blew up the jail and found a tunnel that led from the jail out into the hills somewhere, but it was so choked up by the powder the outlaws set off in it that a man could not get through. That tunnel accounted for the escapes from the jail."

"Yes, I know, Bertie."

"Well, I sent my creeping catamount through to spy out the land beyond, for he could squeeze through, and he performed the service well. Then I set men at work to clear the tunnel, but now further explosions have taken place in it, and we are cut off in that direction entirely and have had to give it up."

The thing to be done is to discover the other exit."

"I see."

"And that is the work in hand now. I think I'll put my creeping catamount at it again, as he is eager to undertake it for me, and see if he can't locate their den. And then I have a scheme in mind for a flashing fire—But, what is the use of filling your pretty head with all that? These things are only for men to talk about. One thing I will say, however, and that is that I'm going to wind up the business this deal or go broke!"

"Ha! ha! How slangy you are!"

"Can't help it—unless I try. But, to sum the matter up, the fellows are in a place where we can't get at them, yet awhile, and it is going to be a game of brains between me and Hornet Hugh and his chief."

"And you will win."

"That is what I have just declared."

"Then you must feel confident that you have brains, I take it."

She said it playfully.

"Well, there is something sloshing around in my think-box that answers the purpose, anyhow."

The young lady laughed, and they changed the subject.

In half an hour Bertie took leave.

Before doing so, he had called Hop Wah and told him to be even more watchful than ever over Miss Warren.

Bertie bent his steps in the direction of the bank.

He had nearly reached there, when suddenly something struck him in the back with almost force enough to knock him down.

At the same moment the report of a rifle came to his ears, and turning as quickly as he could, he looked in the direction of the sound and saw a tiny puff of smoke rising in the air.

It seemed to have come from an upper

window of a building next to the Bull's-Eye Saloon.

Bertie ran in that direction immediately.

He zigzagged as he ran, so as to discourage another shot, for the other had been a close call.

In fact, it would have been his death, only for a bullet-proof skin which he had on under his coat, a skin that had been given him by the hermit of the mountain.

More about the hermit anon.

No other shot was fired, and Bertie reached the building in a few moments.

It was a store kept by a ponderous German, and there were rooms above the store, though Bertie did not know what use was made of them.

He had never given them a thought.

"Mein Gott!" cried the Teuton, as Bertie dashed in. "What peen der matter vas, vielleicht!"

"Who fired that rifle at me from upstairs, that's what's the matter!" Bertie hotly responded. "Which is the way up, Dutchman? Come, get a gait on and show me!"

"A rifle fired—get a gait on—"

"Bosh, dunderhead!" And Bertie made a dash for a door.

It was a door opening upon a hall, and the staircase was discovered immediately.

Bertie started up the stairs three steps at a time, getting out his revolvers as he ran, and keeping his eyes open for danger.

He soon discovered that the rooms were unoccupied. Later, he learned that a family had lived there, but had moved out a short time before. But this information signified nothing.

The landing reached, he made a dash for the front room.

The door was ajar, and giving it a kick, Bertie sent it wide open with a bang.

He checked himself, not leaping in with

the opening of the door, but the next second he sprang in and to the centre of the room.

It was a risk to run, but he felt equal to the emergency.

He believed that he could be as quick as the other fellow, and that it would be an even chance.

But when he had swept a swift survey around the room he discovered that no one was there, but a rifle lay on the floor between the windows.

Bertie stepped forward and picked it up, at the same time keeping watch behind him to guard against a sudden attack, but no one appeared and he had to conclude that the man had escaped.

The owner of the house was lumbering and puffing up the stairs from below.

Bertie examined the rifle.

The barrel was still warm from the discharge, and it had the smell of powder recently burned.

But there was nothing else in the room to give the slightest clue to the affair, and by the time Bertie had scanned everything the German came in.

"Mein gootness!" he exclaimed. "What for a fellers you peen, anyveg, sbord?"

"Do you know this rifle?" Bertie demanded.

"Yaw; id peen mein own rifles."

"Your rifle, eh?"

"Yaw."

"Where did you keep it?"

"In der back rooms von mein store where I sleeks."

"And didn't you hear the shot fired?"

"Yaw, yaw; I hear me dot shot; but den I hear a shot in der Pull's-Eye every leedle while, somedimes."

"And you thought it was in there, eh?"

"Yaw; dot's id."

"Well, it wasn't; it was right here in this room, and it was fired at me. And it came

mighty near being fatal, too, for it was a close one, I tell you that!"

"Mein gootness!"

"And if it had killed me, old fellow, and they had found this rifle here as I found it, they might have arrested you for the crime."

"Yee-veedecker! Und I peen yust so innocent as der babe what's been bornd already to-morrow! Id vas not me done dose murder, I swear me so on stack Bibles so high oop like der houses!"

"Did you see any one come into your place?"

"Nein."

"And you heard no one?"

"Nein, nein. I swear me dot is so, sbord!"

"Well, all right; but the fact remains that somebody did come in, get your rifle, and come up here and take a pop at me; and I'd give a dollar just to know who it was."

Bertie questioned further, but it was of no use, for the Teuton knew nothing about the matter, so he gave it up and left the house, continuing on to the bank. He was sore where the bullet had struck, and would be glad for a chance to sit down.

"Shamrach, you have saved my life again," he said to himself. "Only for you, I'd now be in the other country. I'm glad you urged me to wear the skin, and that you insisted upon my putting it on. I wonder who it was fired at me? It may have been Norris, and yet I hate to suspect the fellow, for I did not think there was murder in his heart."

### CHAPTER III.

#### RED-HOT TIMES IN FREEZE OUT TOWN.

Diamond Dick, Jr., entered the banking office.

He was known, of course, and entered with the same liberty Phil Norris had taken.

He tapped on Mr. Warren's door, how-

ever, and being told to come in, opened the door and entered the little private office.

"Ah!" the banker exclaimed, the moment he saw who it was. "Glad to see you back again, Mr. Wade! But, the mischief! What is the matter with you? You are pale! Sit down!"

"I feel pale, too," said Bertie, as he dropped upon a chair. "Fact of the business, I have just been shot."

"Shot!"

"Yes."

"Where—by whom? Let me get the doctor—"

The banker started up, but Bertie motioned him back into his seat, saying:

"No need of a doctor, Mr. Warren, for it didn't penetrate. If it had, I would be in need of an undertaker at this stage of the game."

"Then the skin—the skin saved you!"

"Yes."

"Thank God!"

"And you, are you wearing the one I brought down for you?"

"Yes; I put it on as you desired me to do, but I find it mighty uncomfortable, it is so warm."

"No matter, it will be only for a day or so, and then the danger will be over, for I'll have those fellows by that time, or go out of business."

"Then you have a plan?"

"Yes, but have not got it worked out in detail yet."

"But this shot at you—who was it fired it? Did you get the fellow and punish him?"

"No, I did not get him, and I don't know who it was," Bertie answered. And he went ahead and related the circumstances.

But he did not mention Phil Norris in that connection.

He gave him the benefit of the doubt.

By the time he had told the story he felt

better, the faintness caused by the force of the bullet having passed over.

"And now, Mr. Warren, another matter," he said.

"What is that, Mr. Wade?"

"An unpleasantness at your house."

"What do you mean?"

"Phil Norris has just been there, pressing his suit upon your daughter. I would not speak of this, but he has drawn me into it unpleasantly. She refused him, and he accuses me of having come between him and the lady."

"Ahem!"

"He was about to threaten her—in fact, had threatened her, when I entered the house, and I had to bring him up with a round turn. Your daughter ordered him out, and now, I fear, we have another enemy to deal with. I mention this so that you can guard your daughter."

"I see. I shall call the fellow to order—"

"No, I would not do that, but give him a chance to show his hand. I think that he may attempt to carry Miss Warren off, that is all, and she must be on her guard, you see."

"Yes, I see. It will not be well for him to attempt anything of that kind."

"And I think of taking up my quarters at the hotel."

"I cannot permit that, sir."

"But this fellow links my name with that of Miss Warren, and to stop any talk that may arise—"

"We'll hear no more of that," said the banker. "After all that you have done for me and mine, you remain at my house as my guest or you offend me!"

"Very well, then; but I wanted it understood."

"I understand."

Bertie then mentioned other matters, and presently took leave.

From there he went across to the Bull's-Eye, where he had told some of the men of his posse to meet him.

He had organized a strong posse for the purpose of hunting Hornet Hugh out of the hills, but their recent attempt, as we have heard from Bertie, had been without success.

He found the men awaiting him there.

They were Jim Gordon, Andy Morris and others of their stamp.

Good citizens, every man of them, and men to be relied on in almost any emergency.

To them Bertie unfolded the plan that had forced itself in his mind, and it met with their hearty approval at once.

But the plan was not yet perfected.

It would require further spying on the part of Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, partner on four legs before the "flashing fire" feature could be arranged for.

The men were in favor of it, as said, and discussed it thoroughly.

They were still talking when there arose an excitement in the street, and they all started up.

A horseman had passed the Bull's-Eye at speed, shooting and shouting as he went, and they all wondered who it could be.

"Some fresh cowboy, I take et," remarked Gordon, "come in to shoot up the town."

"Not likely et would be Hornet Hugh, now," said Morris.

They were hastening to the door.

Before they reached the exit a man sprang into the room, shouting:

"Hornet Hugh, or I'm a liar! He flung somethin' in at the winder of the bank, and went right on like hot!"

This interested Diamond Dick, Jr., instantly.

It must be one of the gang, he believed, if he had done what this man reported.

Bertie soon reached the door and leaped out.

He glanced at the bank.

Sure enough, there was a great hole through the window of Mr. Warren's private office.

The horseman was by this time far up the street, heading for the hills above the town, going in the direction of Bowlder Bridge.

Bertie took a swift survey around.

In front of the hotel a horse was standing, with the bridle thrown over a post.

"I'll have that chap, if there is any speed in this horse!" Bertie cried, as he ran across the street. "Look after Mr. Warren, boys."

It took him but a few moments to reach the horse.

Snatching the rein from over the post, he vaulted into the saddle and was off at speed.

He followed the direction the daring outlaw had taken and had him in sight when he cleared the street and turned toward the hills.

The other fellow was then going up the slope, and in a few minutes more would be lost to sight. He was out of range, so Bertie did not waste any shots firing at him.

Meantime there was a great crowd on the street of Freeze Out.

The shooting and shouting of the venturesome outlaw had brought people from every direction.

And then, when Bertie started in hot pursuit of him, they cheered him to the echo and bade him not to fail to bring the fellow back.

While this was going on others had run into the bank, under Bertie's directions, to look after Mr. Warren, and they found him in his office, pale and trembling.

His two armed men on guard there had stationed themselves at the door of the private office to defend him.

But they admitted Jim Gordon without challenge.

"What's the matter, Mr. Warren?" was

Gordon's quick question. "What was et that cuss flung in at ye?"

"That's what it was," said the banker, pointing.

In a corner lay an old boot, much the worse for wear, and in size enormous.

"That old stogy?"

"Yes; and this was in it," said the banker.

He held up a piece of paper—a large piece of store paper—on which something had been pencil-printed.

It was a crude affair, with letters of almost every kind intermingled, with rude drawings of coffins and skulls and cross-bones here and there upon it.

"Ther devil!" cried Gordon, when he looked at it.

"You may call him so," said Warren. "Are you reading what it says?"

"No, I'm lookin' at the pictur's."

"Hear this, then," and the banker read it aloud.

It was too horrible and too indecent to be set forth here as it was in the original.

It said that one blow had been struck, that another was soon to fall, and that then would come the end for the man addressed.

And that was Mr. Warren.

"He'd orter be hanged!" cried Jim Gordon. "And he'll git et, too, ef we git him!"

"Yes; but what does he mean, declaring that one blow has been struck? Nothing has happened here that I'm aware of, Jim."

"Mebby he calls this a blow, flingin' this hyer old boot at ye."

"No, no; that cannot be."

"What then?"

"Ah! I think I have it now."

"What is et?"

"Diamond Dick, Jr."

"What about him? He is all right."

"Why, he was shot at a short time ago and almost killed."

"The deuce ye say!"

"Yes, it's so."

"But they didn't git him, though, so where does this hyer come in to bear on that?"

"Don't you see?"

"Hanged ef I do."

"This was written before that shot was fired. They expected it to be a sure shot and certain death to our friend, and hence speak of it as something already done."

"By Jarvis, you must be right!"

"I believe I am."

"But he is alive, and very much alive at that, as the feller may find to his sorrier before he is much older."

"Where is he?"

"Gone in chase of him, hot foot."

"Then follow him, follow him fast, Jim, and aid him."

"By heavens, that's right! I never thought of et, Mr. Warren! But then he's more'n a match fer one feller——"

"Yes, but if there should be more——"

"That's enough said; I'm off!"

The man hastened out of the office and called for his men to get their horses.

Men scurried off to obey, and ere long they began to appear on the plaza, mounted and ready for the trail again.

Gordon started off with the first handful he could gather, telling the others to follow as fast as possible, and so they went stringing out of the gulch.

The excitement was at a high pitch, and even some men on foot started off in the direction of Bowlder Bridge, the sooner to learn the result of Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, hot pursuit.

In a few minutes the last man of the posse was speeding away to catch up with the procession.

And there was nothing then to do but await their return.

But a new excitement arose.

Now from the direction of the Warren cot-

tage came wild screams, and those who looked that way saw a sight to chill their blood.

A man was running from the rear of the cottage, bearing in his arms a feminine form, while the screams came from two women servants who had rushed through the house to the front door.

If there had been excitement before it was not to be compared to the excitement now. Men ran in the direction the kidnaper was taking to intercept him, but he was a swift runner, even with the burden he carried, and was heading diagonally away from them.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### EVERYTHING THE VILLAINS' WAY.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had he been there, would have seen through the scheme now.

The shot that had been fired at him had evidently been fired by Hornet Hugh or one of his men, with the hope of removing him at once.

Had that been effected the town would have gone wild.

Then, in the midst of the excitement, the horseman would have dashed up the street and flung the boot through the banker's window just as it had been done anyhow.

Perhaps there had been a double motive in that.

In case they had failed to shoot Diamond Dick, Jr., would he not be one of the first to follow that horseman?

And then, with all attention drawn that way, this other fellow would carry off Miss Warren, and he might succeed in doing it without drawing any attention.

Certainly, that would be his game.

But that it had not succeeded the shrill shrieks of the servants attested.

And now, out from the rear of the cottage again, another actor appeared upon the

scene, a young Chinee mounted on a lady's bicycle.

He was hatless, there was blood streaming from a hurt on his head and the machine wobbled considerably at first as he tried to lay his course after the fleeing man.

It was Hop Wah, the Mascot.

Keeping close watch upon his mistress, he had witnessed the attack.

Starting to spring to the rescue, giving a cry of alarm as he did so, a pistol thrown at him had struck him on the head and knocked him over.

But his cry had drawn the attention of the servants.

In spite of having been dazed by the blow, he had struggled up, gotten Miss Warren's bicycle and started in hot chase, and he was soon fairly making the dainty bicycle spin.

Then came a bellow from another direction.

It came from Handsome Harry, the Serpent of Siskiyou, and he came tearing to the rescue.

He had been detailed for a special service, and had remained at his post throughout all the other excitement, till now, when he knew he was needed.

He popped into view from somewhere in the rear of the big store belonging to one Archer Burlingam.

"Glee-ory to snakes an' house afire!" he let forth his bellow. "Wake up, snakes, an' turn squirrels! Git a gait on ef ye ever did! Stop thar, you infernal pizen yap!"

Harry produced his brace of enormous guns as he ran, but they seemed to have no effect upon the man he was after.

He fired a couple of shots over his head to scare him.

But it didn't.

The fellow knew as well as Harry did that he could not be fired at without extreme danger of hitting the girl.

And thus, while the crowd came shouting from the plaza, the Mascot and the Serpent of Siskiyou were in the van and would be the first to overtake the rascal.

But where was he heading for?

That was what puzzled most of them, for he was sure to be caught.

It had looked at first as if he intended going toward the big store from behind which Harry had emerged.

Be that as it might, he changed his course slightly, and headed toward an old building that had been for a long time deserted and used as a storage place.

And it was soon decided that this must be his objective point.

Mascot was fast gaining.

The man reached the door of this building, and there paused and looked behind him.

He saw the young Chinee on the wheel, and the Red Serpent of Siskiyou from another direction, and the mass of people some distance farther away.

He drew a gun and took quick aim.

The first shot was at the Mascot, and the moment the shot rang out the wheel swerved and Hop Wah took a header.

He fired again, instantly, this time at Handsome Harry, and the Serpent was seen to check, stagger, and clasp his hand to his breast for an instant, but he ran on.

The man now entered the building and disappeared from their sight.

Handsome Harry was now in the lead, while the Mascot was trying to scramble up and start again.

The fellow had closed the door after him with a slam, and when Harry reached it, a minute later, he found it heavily secured.

But that did not greatly bother the Serpent of Siskiyou.

Running back a little way, to get a start,

he intended dashing forward and plunging his shoulder against it.

It would not be the first time by many that he had opened a door in this fashion, carrying it off its hinges and sending it to the floor with a crash.

But just as he was about to start, an amazing thing happened.

The earth trembled, there was a sullen roar ending with a terrific explosion, and the building was lifted bodily in air.

It was raised at least a foot, then it fell back again, and up through the roof of it burst a great cloud of smoke, carrying with it a great bulk of debris of all sorts.

The shock hurled Handsome Harry to the ground, and the Mascot, who was even nearer at the moment, went down as if shot.

Even some in the crowd lost their footing.

They were drawing near at the moment, but, needless to say, they stopped short.

For some moments, then, there was a perfect storm of falling wreckage, old boxes, barrels, jugs and bottles, and a little of everything.

When it ceased, the crowd surged forward.

"Glee-ory to snakes an' skin of yer teeth!" bellowed the Serpent of Siskiyou. "Why didn't they wait jist a minnit longer, and they would had me right in the middle of et, they would so! Wake up, snakes, an' shiver!"

"Allee samee play hellee, no mistakee," chimed in the Mascot, wiping a smear of blood from his face. "Where is Diamond Dick, Juny? Dam lascal cally off pletty lady, no tellee what become of now. Must be 'nothel hole to hills, allee samee, like under jail!"

"Glee-ory to snakes an' all things squirm-in'! That's jist et, fer nickels and dimes, Mascot, et is so! Wake up, snakes, an' screech! What is ter be done, people? What kin be done? Glee-ory to snakes an' circlin' cyclones, I'm almost crazy, I am so! Ef my

leetle pardner, son of his dad, was only hyer this blessed minute!"

"Allee samee shuttee yaup!" cried the Mascot. "Send twenty men, double quick, to guard house, so no more happen there—"

"By heavens, that's the idee!"

"Come on, boys!"

Ten or a dozen men hastened off in the direction of the cottage.

"And allee samee, sendee men to watchee ovel Mr. Warren," the Mascot went on. "Maybe more devils in town to do more mischief, if no lookee out. Oh! Hi-yi! Diamond Dick, Juny, killee me, Hally, him surely will!"

"Ther Chinee knows what he's talkin' about, all right, all right," some fellow cried.

"That's what he does! Some of us must stand by Mr. Warren!"

"Glee-ory to snakes an' bullgines, yes!" agreed Handsome Harry. "Be off with ye, and don't let him know what's happened ef ye kin help et!"

"That's right!"

And some of them started for the bank.

"Now, then, the rest of ye git yer picks and shovels, lightnin' soon, and git to work hyer," the Serpent added. "We must clear away this wreck and find what's under et. Wake up, snakes, an' git up steam!"

The building had been badly wrecked by the explosion.

Its roof was gone, save some ragged splinters, and the ends and sides were ready to fall apart.

The crowd speedily got to work, and in a few minutes the building was laid low, and the mess of rubbish within was exposed to view.

And such a tangle!

Stones and earth and debris of every kind, all in one grand heap.

One thing was recognized instantly, that

the quick rescue of the young lady would be out of the question.

No telling how long it would take to clear away the wreckage, and in the meantime she might be carried miles away and they helpless to go in pursuit.

As quickly as tools were brought the men set to work with a will, and a showing was soon made in the heap, but presently heavy timbers and heavier stones began to be encountered.

It began to grow discouraging.

Meantime, what about Diamond Dick, Jr.?

We left him going up the slope of the gulch, in hot chase after the outlaw.

The horse Bertie was on was a strange one, but he found that it had considerable of speed, and he put it to the test.

It got over the ground at a lively pace, and Bertie kept to the trail and kept his eyes upon the tracks made by the horse of the desperado, now that he had passed from view.

And thus he sped in the direction of Boulder Bridge.

Once, presently, he got just a glimpse of the fellow again as he turned a bend.

Bertie saw that he had gained upon him slightly, and hoped to gain still more and get a crack at him with a pistol.

If he could get a fair shot he would bring him to grief.

He urged his horse to further effort.

But the animal had been doing its best, and the trail was becoming steeper.

Bertie was now in the hills, and the Boulder Bridge was not far distant, where he hoped to sight the man he was after as he sped along the rim of the gorge.

He might not take that direction, however.

That way was only a by-trail, or a short cut, leading to the home of Shamrach the hermit.

The main trail lay straight across and into

the hills on the other side of the chasm, but even there Bertie might get sight of the fleeing desperado.

But he was not prepared for what was to come.

He did not suspect a trap.

As he drew near the bridge he thought he heard a sound behind him.

Looking back over his shoulder, he saw that he was pursued by two horsemen armed with rifles.

They raised their rifles and aimed at him as he looked, and Bertie threw himself forward upon his horse's neck and dug the animal with his heels.

In another moment he was around the last bend and the bridge was before him.

And then came his surprise.

Standing on the other side of the bridge, dismounted, was the man he had been chasing, with two others besides.

All three of them had braces of revolvers drawn and leveled, and they sang out for Bertie to throw up his hands or take the consequences instantly.

Instead of obeying Bertie ducked low and opened fire upon them while going at speed, and one of the fellows tumbled forward upon his face, while the others returned the fire.

Nor was this all.

The two horsemen coming up behind opened up with their rifles.

Bertie's horse reached the bridge, but there it went down, hit by a bullet, and Bertie was thrown heavily.

He was reeling in the saddle at the instant, hit himself, and when he fell he partly slid and partly rolled toward the edge of the bridge, and it looked as if he would go over.

The horse, sliding toward the other side, did go over the edge, and it went down and down to the depths below with a wild scream of fright that was almost human in its feel-

ing, and in a moment plunged into the icy creek far below.

The two men the moment Bertie was down sprang toward him and threw themselves upon him before he could have done anything further in his defense, even had he been in condition, which he then was not, for he was unconscious; and they quickly secured his hands behind his back.

At this stage of the game it looked as if villainy would triumph, and as if right would be crushed.

## CHAPTER V.

### BERTIE IN THE HIDDEN LAIR.

Diamond Dick, Jr., helpless, was at their mercy.

The two mounted men dashed up and leaped out of their saddles and ran forward.

One of them jammed the muzzle of his rifle against Bertie's head and pulled the trigger, saying as he did so:

"Take that, you accursed sport spy!"

But one of the others knocked the weapon aside just as the trigger was pulled.

Even as it was, the powder singed Bertie's hair in one place, so close was the call the bullet made for his life.

"What you doin'?" the would-be murderer demanded, fiercely.

"What are you doin'?" the retort. "Do you want to spoil all our fun? What's the use shootin' a man when he don't know et?"

"But he killed poor Jim, thar, and not only him, but—"

"And we'll 'tend to him for et all right, bet your life. Ef he ain't hit hard now, we'll torture him when he gits his senses back again. You would spile the whole puddin'!"

"But I guess he is dead now, by the looks of him."

"No, he ain't dead, fer his ticker is goin'. Let's blindfold him before he comes to."

"Et is durn funny that bullets don't take no 'fect on him."

"They would ef they hit. Look at his hat. There was a mark on the band."

One of the rifle bullets had ripped along it with great force.

It had almost cut through in its passage, and the blow was what must have rendered Bertie insensible.

"Yes, that explains et this time, but what about other bullets that we know have hit him? I tell ye, he must be wearin' a chain suit, or somethin' like et."

"Let's probe him with a knife and see," one of the others suggested.

"No, ye don't!" cried the first. "You ain't goin' to spoil the satisfaction we'll have when we make him squeal and beg."

"Well, come! We must git out of this hyer!"

"That's right, you bet! We'll have to put up a fight ef we meet anybody, now!"

"And ef they come from town, follerin' this cuss, they may make merry music fer us before we kin give 'em the shake-off."

"But they won't come; they'll have all they kin tend to right thar to home."

Their dead comrade and Diamond Dick, Jr., were thrown over the back of one of the horses, and they set forward at once.

Two rode ahead, then came the led horse with its burden, and the other two followed.

They kept to the main trail.

Fifteen minutes later the posse from Freeze Out reached the Bowlder Bridge.

Jim Gordon was in the lead, and when he came to the bridge he drew rein abruptly, calling to the others to stop.

"What is et?" those behind called out.

"Thar's been a hot time hyer, that's what et is!"

They pressed eagerly forward.

"Thar is blood," said Gordon, pointing. "Yas, and yander is more of et!"

They dismounted in haste to examine the ground, and Gordon soon made the discovery that a horse had slipped over into the creek.

"Et looks bad fer the young feller, durnation bad!" he declared.

"Do ye think they got him, Jim?"

"Don't et 'pear so?"

"Et does, sure enough."

"We seen whar them two kem out into the trail behind him, and we knowed then that he was in a trap."

"The hull thing was well set, wasn't et!"

"Et shore was!"

"And hyer's where they go on," said another. "Let's foller 'em and 'venge him, anyhow."

"Yes, we'll foller 'em to hades, now, but what we'll wipe out this score. Et is plain that they murdered him and pitched him into the crick."

"And hyer was whar he laid."

The fellow pointed to where the man Bertie had killed had dropped.

The others agreed that it must have been so, and, sad of heart, but grim in their intention, they pushed forward.

It was now revenge.

That was all they hoped for now—revenge.

For they fully believed that Diamond Dick, Jr., had met his fate and gone under.

Where the trail was plain, they pushed forward at good speed, but in a little while the hard footing held scarcely a trace.

There was half a mile of this sort of trail.

Even the wagons that had gone over it for years had hardly made any impression upon the granite bottom.

Unable to pick up the tracks, they made haste to get over the stretch of granite and strike the trail again in the softer ground on the other side of it.

But when they had crossed it—what?

The tracks were not there; they had not come thus far along the trail.

Jim Gordon let out a fierce oath, when he made this discovery, and flung his hat to the ground.

"Don't this beat h—l!" he cried.

And the others were obliged to agree that it did.

"What is ter be done now?"

"Only one thing that kin be done, Jim."

"And what is that?"

"Go back and diskiver the place whar they branched off."

"That's et, but it's easier said than done, I'm afeered. Back it is, boys, and every man of ye watch sharp!"

"I've got a plan, Jim," said one fellow.

"What is it, Nick?"

"Let half of us watch one side, and t'other half the other side."

"That's the idee! Divide yerselves, and don't let nothin' 'scape yer notice."

It took them but a few moments to form in lines.

Then they started back the way they had come, but now at slowest walk instead of speed.

And they kept a close lookout.

Rod after rod was traversed, however, without any discovery.

And, finally, they came back to their point of starting, that is, where they had first lost the tracks.

If Jim Gordon had sworn before, what did he now?

He fairly raved, jumping up and down like a maniac, for a few moments, to express his feelings.

When he had thus worked off a portion of his ire, he calmed down in a measure and wanted to know who could tell him what to do next.

They were all of one mind, that the country, in that half mile, must be scoured.

And in order to do this, they would have to dispense with their horses.

But they were eager for the work, to a man.

They now had a clue.

Somewhere in that half-mile of granite pass, was an outlet by which the outlaws had made their escape.

Before, in their former searches, they had been without anything to guide them, but here was something definite at last, something they could rely on.

Four of the men remained to hold the horses.

The rest of the posse set their faces to the north again, firmly resolved to solve the mystery.

How five horses had been able to leave the plain trail, in broad daylight, and leave no trace of the way by which they had gone, was a puzzle.

They were determined to sift the matter. But would they?

Meanwhile, Diamond Dick, Jr., had come to.

With the first return to consciousness, he could not recall what had happened nor imagine where he was.

He was decidedly uncomfortable, that he knew.

He was lying on his back, in a straining position, and was jolting, jolting.

Then he recognized the hoof falls of the horses, and knew that he was on horseback, and realized that he was being carried slowly down a place where the footing was precarious.

Like a flash it all returned to him, then.

He remembered the men coming behind him, the men waiting for him in front, and his charge at them.

But that was all he knew, for just at that stage of the game his light had gone out,

and had it been his death at that moment it would have been swift and painless.

His head felt sore.

There was a throbbing pain in it, and at one point a sharp, stinging sensation.

He understood it all; he had been shot in the head.

As his mind became clearer, he tried to count the number of horses, but could only decide that there were more than three.

There was one ahead of him, and one behind, and besides these there might be a dozen for all he knew to the contrary. And as for men, he had as yet heard no word spoken.

They were quite a time making the descent, and Bertie noticed that the air was becoming chilly and damp.

Presently he heard the rush and murmur of the creek.

Then he knew where he was.

They had taken him down into the gorge in which ran Freeze-Out Creek, which was probably the way to their rendezvous.

Farther down the air was like the breath of an icehouse, and finally the horses were forced into the icy flow of the creek, and made to wade up the stream.

All this was knowledge which would be useful to Diamond Dick, Jr., if he made his escape.

That, however, was not likely to happen.

He realized that he was in the hands of desperate foes, who would delight in his death.

It was not to be supposed for a moment that they would permit him to escape if they could help it, and as for a rescue, that seemed out of the question.

However, Bertie did not despair.

He had been in tight places before, when hope had seemed as slight.

Bertie is a chap who never despairs, but

leans hard upon Providence and seldom finds his trust misplaced.

The wading was not for a long distance.

The horses presently came out of the water on the side opposite to that on which they had entered.

Bertie could not see, but he was making his ears do duty for eyes.

Then they passed along a place where the footing was hard.

In a few minutes came a change in the sound of the hoof-falls, and Bertie knew they had entered a passage.

Through this they passed, and finally out into open air again.

And the air was warmer here.

In a few moments, then, a halt was called.

"Hyer we aire," said one of the outlaws. "Now unload that thief and see if he's alive."

"And so much the better fer him ef he ain't," another responded. "Ef he is alive, then et will be our pleasure to make him dead. Ha! ha!"

"That's whar ye hit et about right, Lige."

"Down with him."

Bertie felt hands soon at work removing him from the horse.

In a few moments he was laid on the ground, and for the time being he pretended to be still unconscious.

By so doing, he thought that possibly he might hear something that he could make use of, and anyhow he was likely to learn something of their plans.

Having put Bertie on the ground, they next removed the body of their dead comrade, and then Bertie heard the horses led away. A few minutes later the bandage was rudely removed from his eyes.

## CHAPTER VI.

### RICHARD IS HIMSELF AGAIN.

Diamond Dick, Jr., did not stir.

He permitted his head to roll as if he were dead, and did not open his eyes.

Just then, he knew, the eyes of all there were upon him, and the least movement of an eyelid would betray him.

If he could make them think he was still unconscious, they might not be strict in their watch over him, and he might have opportunity to escape.

"Thunder! I guess he is dead all right," said one.

"No, he ain't," said another. "His color ain't right. He don't look like our pard thar, does he?"

"Wull, no, that's so."

"Besides, his ticker is goin' all right," as the man laid a hand on Bertie's breast.

"Then why don't he come to?"

"He will, after awhile. He got et purty hard that time."

"Shell we strip him and see what he wears that makes him bullet-proof? We have had dead beads on him more'n once."

"Not now; time enough fer that later. Let's bury our pard, and then see ef we aire needed in the rest of the business before we fool any further with this feller."

"What if he comes to while we aire busy?"

"Then he kin reflect upon the oncertainties of life and the certainty of death."

"Ha! ha! Wull, all right. He sartain can't git away, anyhow, with his hands and feet tied this fashion."

They moved away, then, leaving Bertie alone.

Bertie's head was lying sidewise on the ground, and presently he opened the eye next to the ground.

Some distance from him a couple of men were at work digging a hole, and farther on were the horses, and a group of men still beyond them.

No one was near him.

He took a survey of his surroundings.

It was a peculiar place in which he found himself, truly.

Light was admitted by an irregular circle of considerable dimensions not directly overhead.

It was more inclined to the south, and through this opening the sunlight was streaming, lighting up the whole cavern-like gulch interior.

The ground was comparatively level.

The place looked as if at some time in ages past it had been a volcano.

It was no wonder that it had remained a mystery to those who had made search for the outlaws' headquarters.

While Bertie was looking, he heard a sound near him.

He turned his head quickly to look.

A man was creeping toward him out from under the edge of the overhanging ledges.

As Bertie looked, the man dropped flat down, uttering a hiss of caution, and in the same moment Bertie recognized him.

It was Shamrach, the mountain hermit.

"Shamrach!"

"Yes; but keep quiet."

"How came you here?"

"I know not; I followed a passage leading from a cave I discovered."

"A lucky discovery for me, anyhow. Free me, as soon as you can, and give me a weapon of defense."

The hermit crept forward, and in a moment more Bertie's hands and feet had been freed, and his rescuer gave a revolver into his hands.

"Thank God for this, Shamrach!" Bertie

exclaimed. "You have proved a friend in need."

"I want no thanks; I'm only glad that I was able to serve you."

"And now we must make a change of base before those fellows return to get me."

"You must come with me, at once. I can lead you out the way by which I came in, and it will be a mystery what became of you."

"You tempt me, but I want to learn more before I go."

"And perhaps lose your life!"

"I am charmed against their bullets, Shamrach."

"You may think that you are, but their next shot may find you in a tender spot."

"Besides, you want to get a look at the chief of this band, to make sure whether or not he is your foe, the man who killed your child."

"Yes, yes, that is true."

"And you will never have a better opportunity than this."

"But the risks we run—it will be sure death to us if we are discovered."

"It will probably be sure death to the discoverer, now that I am free and have this gun in my possession," said Bertie, grimly.

"Then what do you advise?"

"The first thing, we must get away from this spot."

"Then come."

"One moment. You note the peculiar formation of this place, do you not?"

"Yes."

"You see how the light comes in?"

"Yes, I see."

"Well, in two hours from now the place will be in almost darkness."

"Indeed!"

"You see, when the sun has moved past the point where it shines in, the shadows will deepen, and then will come darkness."

"Then in a short time it will be night here, while it is still daylight outside."

"Exactly; and then we'll have every advantage."

"Well, I will be guided by you, my young friend. My years do not count against your wisdom."

"Nonsense! These things are as plain as day."

"Well, let's get away from here."

"Yes, we must."

Bertie led the way, and they hastened to the north side of the peculiar cavern gulch.

Once under shelter of the overhanging ledges they moved rapidly to the westward, and so on around to the southern side, where the shadows were deeper.

And here, in the best place they could find, they stopped.

They could not be seen themselves, but could see the others in the opening.

By this time the men had made ready the grave for their dead comrade, and he was taken up and laid into it and covered over.

Then these two shouted to the group farther away, who were nearer to where Bertie and his old friend were now stationed, asking what should be done with the prisoner.

"You will bring him here," was the order.

"All right."

And the two hastened to the place where Bertie had been left.

"Now the fuss will begin," whispered Shamrach, as he and Bertie waited and watched.

"Yes, now look for a breeze," said Bertie, in response. "They'll be the most surprised men you ever saw."

And so they were—the two who had gone to fetch the prisoner.

Bertie and his companion could see them.

As they came to the place where Bertie had been left, they stopped suddenly short.

This for just an instant, and then, both

moved by the same impulse, they leaped forward at a run and searched this way and that.

Then they stopped, and it could be seen that they were talking excitedly.

And then arose their shouts.

"Hey! hey!" they cried. "The durn cuss is gone, clean gone!"

This was like magic in its effect upon the other outlaws, for they started as if they had been stung.

"Gone!"

"Yes, gone!"

"He can't be! Look fer him!"

"But he is; we have looked for him all around hyer."

With fierce oaths, the outlaws ran in the direction of where the two were standing.

When they reached the spot, their loud voices could be heard in angry tones, but what they said could not be made out.

Some of their oaths, however, were plain enough.

There was the liveliest kind of scurrying around for a few minutes, and then they bunched.

That their prisoner had given them the slip, there was no denying, and great was their chagrin and disappointment.

While Bertie and Shamrach were looking and listening, they heard steps in another direction, and, wheeling about, saw a man come into the open space not far from them.

He stopped and looked around.

Seeing no one, at first, he shouted to learn if any one was there.

"Hilloo!"

The men who had been looking for Bertie came running that way immediately.

They could not know who it was, as yet, and perhaps their first thought was that it was the prisoner who had shouted.

It would have been a crazy thought, if so.

Be that as it might, when they came running up they had their pistols in hand.

As they crossed the space where the sunlight slanting through the rift above fell full upon them, Shamrach seized Bertie's arm.

"That man is he, that man is he!" he whispered.

"Which?" Bertie asked.

Shamrach indicated the one.

It was Clauss, now without a mask on.

"You are sure?" Bertie asked.

"Yes, yes, there can be no mistake, now. And I have seen him before, and not so long ago."

"Where?"

"I know not; but somewhere and in different garb and appearance from this. Now that I see him as he is, it comes back to me, comes back to me."

"Do you connect him with Mr. Burlingam the merchant?"

"Heavens! It is the same person!"

"St!" Bertie cautioned. "Yes, it is the same person, and he is near the end of his rope now."

The newcomer now shouted to the others.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Goin' to shoot me on sight?"

"Is that you, Gil?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen him?"

"Seen who?"

"Our prisoner—Diamond Dick, Jr."

"Thunder, no! Has he got away from you, after all?"

"Yes, he has. We had him here, but now he is gone, and we can't find him."

"Then you're a set of d—n fools, is all I have got to say. Why didn't you fix him out at once so he couldn't get away?"

"He would have been fixed, cuss him, if they had let me done as I wanted to in the matter," one of the men grated. "I tried to blow his head off, but they balked me."

"And a mistake it was, too," the chief of the band admitted. "But, what is the word, Gil? How did it work?"

"Worked like a charm. The gal is a prisoner in the rooms, with the old woman watchin' her."

Diamond Dick, Jr., gave a start, hearing this information.

Whom did they mean?

He had not long to wait for the explanation, for the whole story of the capture of Nellie Warren was soon told.

"Excellent!" cried Clauss, approvingly. "This night there will be a private wedding there, whether she will have it so or not, and I'll humble her proud spirit. And then for the rest of my vengeance upon Abram Warren!"

"We'll see about that," grated Diamond Dick, Jr., between clinched teeth. "You made the mistake of your life when you did not kill me on sight. Now you have me to buck up against. Shamrach, come, we have business out of here as soon as possible. Lead the way."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SECRET OF THE BIG STORE.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was enraged.

He saw how he had fallen into the trap that had been set for him.

And not only that, but how well the outlaws had worked their point and so far won the game out of his hands.

Had they held him prisoner, or had they killed him outright at the beginning, victory would now be theirs, and Mr. Warren would be crushed.

But he was free, thanks to Shamrach.

Without waiting to hear more, for he had already heard more than enough, he followed the hermit.

Shamrach led the way, silently, along un-

der the shadowy south side of the gulch cavern, leaving the villains planning further search for their recent prisoner.

By the time they reached the west end of the cavern the shadows were becoming deeper, for the light was beginning to fail.

And by that time the outlaws were beginning their search.

They were coming that way.

"You will have to hurry, Shamrach," said Bertie. "I would like to make a stand and give these devils hot, if I were well armed, but that is not my game now."

"And I would like to meet that chief demon, man to man, but not now, not now. Come, we are almost to the place where I came in."

The outlaws were coming that way at quick pace.

They were soon at the place where Diamond Dick, Jr., had been left, and they meant to make a thorough search.

Bertie and Shamrach could hear their cursings, as they expressed their disappointment, and they had to move with caution in order not to give away their presence.

Shamrach was a good guide.

A man of the mountains, who had hunted wild animals many a time, he could move silently.

They soon came to the place by which he had found his way into the peculiar cavern, and started to creep out the way he had come.

Bertie stopped him.

"What is it?" Shamrach asked.

"One last look at these devils," said Bertie.

"What for?"

"To feast upon their coming downfall, in imagination, or rather—anticipation."

They could see them distinctly outlined against the now fading circle of light, and Bertie shook his fist at them.

"Enjoy your search for me," he hissed. "You will find me ere long, and in a fashion that will not be to your liking. Everything is favorable to the working of my scheme."

"What is your scheme?" Shamrach asked.

"A flashing fire, and maybe a wing shot that will break their center the first crack."

"I do not understand."

"No, of course you do not, as yet. I'll explain it to you, however. Lead on, now."

And the hermit set forward.

It was a winding, wearying climb through a Stygian passage.

Finally it terminated in a small cavern high up in the hills, a cavern recently discovered by Shamrach.

The opening was almost completely overgrown with wild vines.

Its discovery had been by accident.

Shamrach, in a fall from above, had landed in these vines, and had rolled into the cavern.

It was probably unknown even to the outlaws themselves, and Bertie determined to make use of it in the scheme he purposed undertaking.

As soon as out, they made haste to Shamrach's abode.

They had held little or no conversation coming through the dark passage.

Now, on the way to the house, Bertie made Shamrach acquainted with his plans, and the hermit eagerly fell in with them.

On arrival at the house, Bertie armed himself.

Shamrach had weapons there, his own and those that had belonged to his brother.

Of these, Bertie took his choice, and after a firm hand pressure with the old man of the mountains, set his face in the direction of Freeze Out.

His nearest route lay by way of Bowlder Bridge.

In this direction lay his greatest dangers,

but he decided to take all the risks and save time.

We have gone with him over the same ground before.

Nothing happened, and he reached the Bowlder Bridge in safety, but with a keen lookout in every direction.

Glancing along the trail to the north, he there discovered a number of horses, with three or four men in charge, and his first thought was of the desperadoes.

But on second glance he recognized one of the men.

He knew, then, that the animals belonged to his posse, and he ran in that direction.

As soon as the men saw him they greeted him with a shout, and another shout went up immediately to apprise the rest of the posse.

A signal had been agreed upon by which they could be recalled.

"Welcome, sport!" cried the fellows who had been left to guard the horses. "We thought et was all day with you!"

"Not yet awhile, boys," said Bertie, cheerily, as he shook hands with them.

They acted as if they fairly wanted to kiss him.

"But whar have ye been?" one asked.

"There is no time to tell you now," said Bertie. "Get the rest of the boys here as soon as you can, for there is red-hot work to be done."

"We have called 'em; they will be hyer quick."

And they were.

The signal had been repeated all along the trail.

In a few minutes they began to come in, and ere long they had nearly all arrived.

Bertie had usurped one of the horses, and as soon as there were enough men to mount them all, he gave the word and they started for Freeze Out.

They went at speed, ringing over Bowlder Bridge and clattering along the pass that led down into the gulch where lay the town, and they gave a yell as soon as they sighted the place.

And it was returned from those in the bottom.

Men could be seen laboring over the ruins of the old house that had been blown up.

There was quite an excavation by this time, and the men were working in gangs and relays, relieving one another frequently.

By this means the work was pushed more rapidly.

Handsome Harry was there, evidently having taken upon himself the office of foreman.

When he saw his little partner coming down the slope he gave a great bellow of delight and ran forward to meet him.

"Glee-ory to snakes an' ramfoozlin' bamboozle!" he cried, as soon as he came within hearing distance. "Wake up, snakes, an' jubilate! They told me you had gone and got et in the gold enamel neck, Bertie, boy, they did so; and durn my cats, ef I didn't begin ter think ye had, too! Whoop—hooray!"

And he threw up his hat and kicked up his heels in a great fashion.

Then when he came within reach he seized Bertie's hand in his own great paw, and gave it a hearty shaking.

"Not yet, Harry, old horse," Bertie responded, as he returned the grip his great old pard gave. "How did it happen, anyhow? But, no time to tell me now, and it will keep, anyhow. Where was the Mascot?"

"Glee-ory to snakes an' weepin' angels!" the Serpent exploded. "Whar was the Mascot? He was right thar, and he got et——"

"Not dead!"

"No, no; but he got laid out, and now he is in sack-cloth and ashes, fearin' that you will jump on him when you see him."

"Nonsense! If he couldn't help it, that settles it. But, here, this is no time to pow-wow. Call the men off from that job, Harry, for there is no need exploring further there."

"Glee-ory to snakes an' crockydiles! No need ter—"

"No; that tunnel is blocked both ways, and I think I know where it runs to."

"Wake up, snakes, an' twiddle tails! I told ye, boys, ef my leetle pardner, son of his dad, was only hyer, he would untwist things; I did so!"

Bertie and the posse had not stopped.

They had, however, come down to a walk for the moment, and Bertie now gave the word to speed up again.

"What's yer plan, Diamond Dick, Jr.?" asked Jim Gordon.

"I was just going to announce it," said Bertie. "We will rush right up and surround the Burlingam store."

"Thunderation!"

"What the mischief—"

"And then some of us will go in and hold the place up, regular robber style," Bertie continued. "I mean to search that building from the ground up."

Bertie then let drop a hint concerning something the posse were not yet aware of.

It was a great surprise to them.

Up they dashed, with whoop and yells, right to the doors and windows of the building.

They surrounded it completely, and their orders were to hold up any person who might attempt to escape the cordon.

And then, at once, Diamond Dick, Jr., and several chosen men entered the building, weapons in hand, ordering everybody present to stand where they were, and not move.

And men were left to see that they obeyed the command.

Diamond Dick, Jr., then made a dash for the cellar, judging which door opened to it.

He was not mistaken, and he dashed down the steps in haste, others at his heels, notably Jim Gordon and Andy Morris.

The cellar reached, Bertie made haste to make a light.

That done, he took a survey of the place, which had the appearance of being merely an ordinary cellar.

It contained supplies for the store, mainly.

"Thar's nothin' hyer," declared Gordon.

"Don't look ter be, that's a fact," agreed Morris.

"We'll have to look closer than this," said Bertie. "I have an idea something will be revealed over yonder."

"Why, sport?"

"It is the nearest point to the old building that was blown up; then, too, things are piled there in a suspicious manner."

"We kin durn soon tear 'em down."

"Do so."

In a few minutes the heap of boxes, etc., had been leveled to the floor.

Bertie then sounded the wall in the suspected quarter, and speedily struck a place where it gave forth a hollow sound.

"Here we have it!" he exclaimed.

"What's ter be done?"

"Beat it down, of course."

They needed no second order.

Seizing anything they could find, they attacked the wall with vigor.

For some minutes it withstood their attack, but presently it crumbled, and then a portion fell outward.

A hole was revealed, an opening of considerable extent, with on the one hand an extension like a tunnel and on the other a narrow stairs leading upward.

Bertie saw the secret at a glance. The cellar was that much narrower than the building, and beyond question the rooms above

were also narrower than the outside of the building would indicate.

Diamond Dick, Jr., gave no time to words, but hastened up the stairs, light in one hand and a gun in the other, and was soon on a level with the main floor of the building, and at a rear corner. It was then plain that while the cellar was narrower than the building, the building within was shorter than the cellar.

The stairs continued upward at steepest angle, and finally terminated at a narrow landing, where a door was disclosed to view.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BERTIE DOES THE PROPER THING.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had not tried to observe silence.

The thing important with him had been haste, and now the door reached, he knocked imperatively.

There was no response, and Bertie braced his back against the wall and put a foot against the door to force it; in which he was promptly joined by Jim Gordon.

At first, the door stoutly resisted.

When it did give way it was with a crash, and a room was disclosed.

That was not all; a woman stood facing the door with a brace of revolvers in her hand.

And the instant the door gave way and she saw the men, she opened on them with both guns at the same time, with good intent.

But they were as quick as she, or quicker.

Seeing the danger, they had ducked, and the next moment both leaped forward.

They seized the woman, and other men came into the room behind them, ready to lend assistance if needed.

"You Jezebel!" cried Bertie. "We ought to twist your neck!"

"That's what we'd orter!" grated Gordon, as he got hold of her arms from behind.

The woman struggled desperately, trying hard to kick, scratch and bite; but it was of no use, and she had to submit.

She was an old hag, almost hideous in appearance.

As soon as she had been securely bound, she was flung into a corner and left there.

They had little regard for her feelings.

Meanwhile, leaving that task to others, Bertie had set out to search the apartments.

It was the top floor of the store building, and it had been divided into a suite of living rooms, with the secret outside connection as shown.

Bertie, on first passing through the rooms, found no one, and his great fear was that he had been mistaken in the conclusion he had reached, and that the girl was not there.

But he was mistaken in that.

Seeing another door, he made for it, and it was found locked.

But this did not balk him, for he flung his shoulder against it and broke it down.

A bedroom was revealed, and on the bed, with her hands and feet secured, and with a gag in her mouth, lay pretty Nellie Warren.

Bertie sprang to her side.

With his knife he speedily severed her bonds.

Then he removed the cruel gag and put an arm under her to lift her up.

"O Bertie, Bertie!" she cried, throwing both her arms around his neck and kissing him. "I knew you would come, I knew you would come!"

"You might bet your life I would come, little one," Bertie responded, as he returned her embrace and kisses, and helped her to her feet. "Thank God I was able to find you!"

"But how did you find me? Yet I knew you would!"

"I guessed where you were, little one, as

soon as I heard the villains telling what they had done."

"You heard them telling?"

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"A prisoner in their stronghold."

"Mercy!"

"But this is no time to chat; there will be lots of time for that after awhile."

"I hope so, Bertie; I do, indeed!"

She kissed him again, a warm, passionate kiss, and then others were heard coming.

Bertie released himself from her embrace, giving her a word of caution, and they were turning toward the door when others entered.

"Praise God ye got her!" cried Jim Gordon.

"Yes, we did not come here in vain, boys," Bertie responded. "And we must take her to her father immediately."

"Yes, yes, or he will go mad," said the girl.

"Wull, we'll lose no time about that," said Gordon.

"But I can take her," Bertie said, further. "You, Jim, choose half a dozen good men and put them down there to guard that tunnel."

"Whatever you say, sport."

"And arrest or kill any man who comes that way."

"We'll do et, by ginger!"

There was a regular staircase leading down to the lower floors, of course, and Bertie went down this way.

Miss Warren had hastily removed the traces of her recent rough handling, as far as possible, before the mirror in the bedroom before starting.

A great crowd was in front of the store.

In fact, nearly the whole population of

Freeze Out, drawn thither by the strange doings of the posse.

The moment Diamond Dick, Jr., appeared, leading Miss Warren, a great shout went up, and for a few moments the people fairly made the welkin ring with their cheers.

Everybody wanted to shake hands.

But a few neat words from Bertie prevented this delay.

Room was made for them to pass, and he led Miss Warren away in the direction of her home.

Needless to say, he had a wary eye out for danger.

He had been shot once on the street.

He did not care for another experience of the kind, with the danger of having the bullet find the beautiful girl instead of himself.

Yet he hardly expected anything of the kind.

The outlaws, as he knew, were at their secret rendezvous, and the tunnel was guarded.

When they neared the Warren cottage, a man came running toward them, shouting, and Bertie looked to see who it was.

It was Phil Norris, the disappointed lover.

Bertie laid a hand on a gun.

"We do not want to speak to him," said Nellie. "Let us hasten on to the house."

"He is bound to speak to us, though, if he can," said Bertie. "Maybe he has important information of some sort."

"It is possible, but I believe he means to annoy me."

"Let him try it on, then!"

In a moment more Norris came up.

"Will you—will you let me speak?" he asked.

And he asked it humbly enough.

"If you are lively about it," said Bertie, curtly.

"I was mad, crazy; my eyes have been opened; I want to offer apology to both."

Miss Warren looked at him with surprise.

"Are you in earnest?" Bertie asked.

"I am! God knows I am. The agony that I have suffered since Miss Warren was carried away! It has brought me to my senses. Thank God you rescued her. Will you forgive me for all?"

"Yes, with pleasure, for I see that you are in earnest," said Bertie.

Norris seized his hand.

"God bless you!" he said, fervently. "I deserved to be shot, for the threats I made. And you, Nel—Miss Warren, can you forgive me, too? It is all I ask, your forgiveness."

"I forgive you, Mr. Norris."

"You make me happy, happy indeed. Oh, the joy it was to know that you had been rescued!"

"Where is my papa?" Nellie asked.

"He is at the house. We sent him there under the care of several men. You must hasten to him; I must not detain you here a moment."

"No, I must go to him immediately," said the girl. "Mr. Wade, will you excuse me?"

"I will go on with you—"

"No, it is but a step now; I can run there in a moment."

She did not wait for further words, but hastened away immediately with swift steps.

"Diamond Dick, Jr., you must have set me down for an ass," said Norris, in a sort of shame-faced manner.

"Well, I did," said Bertie, "to be frank about it. You were taking the very course to injure your cause, rather than to promote it."

"I know it, I know it; but how could I help it, loving Nellie as I did—as I do?"

"There may be a chance for you yet, if you play the cards right."

"What do you mean?"

He was surprised.

"I mean what I say. She respects you for what you have just done, and by playing your cards well you may yet reach her heart."

"Yes; but you?"

"Oh, I am not in it; I shall be away from here as soon as this game has been played to the finish."

"But she loves you!"

"No; she only thinks she does; she is grateful for what I have been able to do for her father, that is all. She will come to after I am gone."

Bertie spoke in a light, laughing manner.

The change it brought over Norris was wonderful, and he seized Bertie's hand and wrung it again.

A few words more along that line, and Bertie changed the subject.

"About Mr. Warren," he said. "Who told him what had happened?"

"I did, like the chump I was. I thought he knew it, but they had been keeping it from him."

"You did wrong there."

"I knew it at once, for it almost crazed him."

"Well, I must hasten on to the house, Norris. No hard feelings between us now."

He shook hands with the young man and hastened on to the cottage.

There he found father and daughter weeping in each other's embrace, and he did not intrude upon them.

But as soon as they noted his presence they both ran to him and each seized a hand, and while they held his hands they showered their thanks upon him.

Even little Ollie came and hung upon him.

It was a joyous time.

Presently, when the outburst subsided, and

they took seats, Bertie asked for the Mascot.

"Oh, he is downstairs crying to break his heart," said Ollie.

"Crying?"

"Yes."

"What is he crying about?"

"Because he did not prevent them from carrying off Nellie."

"The gosling! Tell him to come up here, will you, Ollie?"

"Well, you bet!"

And the child sprang to obey.

In a moment she returned, the Mascot following her with bandaged head.

He had wiped his eyes, but they still showed signs of his genuine grief, and he acted sheepish.

"Come here, Mascot, and tell me all about it," said Bertie, in his cheery manner. "I know you could not help it, so what is the use your moping so?"

"But allee samee, me could helped it, if me had gottee dlop on dam lascal first," the Mascot complained. "But him thlow levoller at me, takee me on head, and down me go all in heap."

"Then why are you blaming yourself for what you couldn't help?"

"Me no business to gittee hit."

"Pshaw! I have got it myself, and more than once, this game. You just cheer up, and I'll give you another chance at that fellow, perhaps."

"Oh! Hi-yi! You lettee me get dlop on him, see if don't makee him dance fandango! Makee him wish he never thlow pistol at Hop Wah, you bettee! Makee him feel belly sick!"

The others laughed, and the Mascot left the room in better spirits, feeling himself reinstated.

Bertie made his stay short, for he had other business to attend to.

But he left the house well guarded.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SHAMRACH'S SECRET LOST FOREVER.

Diamond Dick, Jr., looked up Handsome Harry at once.

That was no trouble, for the great old Serpent of Siskiyou was largely in evidence.

It seemed as if he would never tire of whooping-up the victory of his "leetle pardner, son of his dad," against the evil combination.

Having found him, he sent him to fetch the Ace o' Spades.

Junius, by the way, had been assigned to a special duty, and had been debarred from taking part in the recent exciting events.

In due time he reported.

"By golly, boss, I's gwine tuh resign, dat's what I is," he complained, the moment he appeared.

"Why, what's the matter?" Bertie asked.

"What am de mattah! Didn't you done poke me off to watch a sartain place, and didn't you an' de rest have all de 'citemental while I was doin' nothin'?"

"You watched, didn't you?"

"Shua!"

"And did your full duty, eh?"

"Well, now, you bet nobody went by dat dar way, boss!"

"Then you did as much as any of the rest, and more than some, so what are you kicking about?"

"Yas, dat dar am all right to say, but when dar is trouble I jis' want to hab a finger in it, see? But, what's wanted dis time, boss?"

"I'm going to put you into trouble this time clear up to your middle. You will have no cause for complaint, I think, by the time you get done, if you come out with a whole skin."

"Golly! What am it, boss?"

And then Bertie explained what he required.

Instantly the little darky was as chipper as a cricket, eager to take the chances.

It was a risky business Bertie had laid out for him, but what did that matter to a chap who had been so long under the training of Diamond Dick, Jr!

"Mah stahs!" he exclaimed. "Ef I don't play de catamount racket on 'em dis time, den I's no prophet; and as fo' de flashin' fiah, bet yo' sweet life I done make her flash proper right!"

"All right, Junius, I think you will, too. And now attend to what more I have to say, for I am giving you a most important work to do."

"I's all ears, boss."

"Here is a watch for you, which I have set exactly like my own. Only for my secret pocket those fellows would have had my watch along with my guns."

"Golly, boss, what's comin'?"  
"Only this: The first flash of the fire must occur at an exact time, and at that time we will be on the lookout for it. When it comes, we'll be ready to take a wing shot at anything that shows itself."

"But by golly, don't you go to shootin' at no catamounts!"

"No, no, we won't hit you."

Bertie went on, then, and explained minutely what was required. And he made sure the Ace o' Spades understood before he let him go.

When that had been accomplished, then Bertie went with his black satelite to the place where the jail had stood.

Here he helped him to don his catamount guise, and supplied him with all things needed.

Then, with a final word and a handshake, he sent him to perform the mission.

The darky boy crept away through the tunnel, and Bertie returned.

He was getting ready to strike the final blow.

Calling his posse together, in a private session, he appointed leaders and laid the details of his plans before them.

The secret rendezvous of the outlaws was to be invaded by every known avenue, the

men were to station themselves along under the ledges in the cavern, and there await the signal.

Bertie sent one division of his forces to Shamrach, for him to act as their guide.

Jim Gordon was to take another through the tunnel from the store.

Bertie himself set out to cut the desperadoes off from their means of escape by way of Freeze-Out Creek.

When everything had been understood, then Bertie set out, leaving Gordon to do his part, and at the Bowlder Bridge over the creek he parted with the other posse.

These went on to the home of the mountain hermit, while Bertie followed the main trail to find the secret turn-off.

They were without horses, needless to say.

Bertie intended making a short search for the secret trail leading down to the creek.

Failing to find it, he had planned to let himself down into the gorge by means of a rope, with as many men as would volunteer to take the risks.

And he was sure of them all.

They observed silence as they went along the trail.

Not that they deemed it absolutely necessary, but there was no reason for noise.

Bertie was keeping the closest kind of a lookout for signs, though he felt it almost useless to search where such men as Gordon had already searched.

And so it might have been.

But fortune favored Bertie in a way he little expected.

They were passing along, when of a sudden Bertie saw a portion of the rock wall on his right move.

He stopped short, lifting a finger as a signal for silence, and every man was like a statue instantly, waiting and watching breathlessly.

The rock continued to move, proving that it was a balanced rock, one of those freaks in which Nature has in several known instances indulged; and when it stopped, a passage was revealed.

And then, out from this passage, rode a horseman.

He drew rein with a jerk, when he saw the men on the trail, but it was too late then.

He could not draw back, he could not advance, and there was nothing left for him to do but put up his hands as Bertie ordered him to do.

The fellow was caught in a trap.

"How much is your life worth to you, my fine fellow?" Bertie demanded.

"Guess et ain't worth a whole lot, now that you have got the bulge on me," was the growled response.

"You are right there, for you deserve to be hanged along with the rest of your evil crew; but I'm going to give you a chance, if you will take it."

"Name et, sport."

"Leave your horse here and guide us down to the cavern."

"And git shot fer my pains, ef the boys git the best of you, hey? I don't relish that."

"You don't, eh? Well, now, it is sure death right here if you don't, so make up your mind. As for the rest of your gang, they don't stand a ghost of a show."

And Bertie told him why.

The fellow was convinced, and he yielded and promised what was required.

Bertie caused his hands to be bound, and disarmed him, and he was told that if he made an attempt to get away, or betray them, they would blow his head off.

Before going on, Bertie learned the secret of the moving rock, and had it set back to its place.

Then they set forth along the trail for the cavern.

Bertie had been that way before, though he had then been unable to see the trail.

He now recognized it, however, by its sharp descent and by the damp, cold air as they drew near the creek.

Here they found that it was not necessary to wade, except horsemen, for the outlaws had provided a bridge for their own use when on foot.

This was crossed, and so on and into the cavern.

The utmost silence was observed, and when the cavern was reached it was found to be in darkness.

About the time they entered, however, shouting and shooting came to their ears

from the farther side, and the flashes of weapons were to be seen.

This lasted but a few minutes.

Diamond Dick, Jr., guessed what it was, and he was not mistaken.

The outlaw chief had started through the tunnel terminating at his store in town.

But he had met with a great surprise, and had turned back, followed by the posse whom he had unexpectedly encountered in the tunnel.

His return and report had caused the outlaws to open fire to keep the posse back while they could make their escape by another direction, for they never dreamed that they were entrapped there.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had lighted a match and looked at his watch.

In just half an hour he could expect the flashing fire, and it was likely to be a weary time of waiting.

But before a third of the time had passed they heard the outlaws coming in that direction, intent upon making their escape, and when they came near Bertie warned them back.

With wild oaths they turned and retreated the way they had come.

Diamond Dick, Jr., feared that they might have another means of exit unknown to him.

But by this time his men were so well encircled around the cavern that it would be hard for the fellows to pass them unchallenged.

Bertie and some of his men followed silently in the direction the outlaws had taken, and Bertie eagerly awaited the flashing fire that would signal the attack.

And at last it came.

There was a white flash, not unlike the flash of lightning, but instead of disappearing at once, it lasted.

Afar up in the rocks at one side of the cavern it blazed, and Bertie casting a swift look at the glowing brightness, caught sight of a catamount creeping out of the glare.

But there was no time for more than a glance. Bertie had bigger game to look for just then. He swept the level for a sign of the outlaws, and caught sight of one of them. At that one he took a wing shot, without

aim, and the fellow threw up his hands and dropped.

The shot was a signal, and with a whoop and yell all hands were up and making for the place where the outlaws were. And while they ran, another flashing light gleamed forth, and yet another, making the cavern as light as day, almost; and the outlaws must have recognized at once that they did not stand much of a chance against Diamond Dick, Jr.

To make it brief, they were soon surrounded and forced to surrender, but when noses were counted, Bertie found that the chief offender of all had eluded his dragnet and made his escape. Bertie was greatly chagrined, but he by no means despaired. He would have the fellow yet, he declared, if he remained in that section, which, however, he hardly believed the man would do. It was a satisfaction that he had the notorious Hornet Hugh, at least.

It was a grand return to Freeze Out, by way of the tunnel to the store of the chief villain, Archer Burlingam; and when they arrived, there was one of the greatest times the little town had ever put up. The people rose in their might, so to say, and, in spite of the protest of Diamond Dick, Jr., tried Hornet Hugh and found him guilty and hanged him all within an hour. And that the rest escaped the same fate was due to the fact that Bertie showed determination that Judge Lynch should no further encroach upon his jurisdiction.

But even so, it was likely that the same fate awaited the others by due process of law. Bertie's "catamount" came back from his perilous mission all right, and came in for a share of the plaudits of the community. There was a general jubilee over the fact that Hornet Hugh had at last been brought to the end of his evil career. Later in the day, Bertie received word from the hermit to visit him at his home, and believing that it must be important, Bertie set forward at once. It was night by the time he reached there. He found the hermit with a wound in the shoulder, and in pain, but there was a light of satisfaction on his face.

He had added to his collection, he told

Bertie, and invited him in to see the specimen. Bertie knew this meant something, the way it was said, but he did not guess the truth. He entered the room with the hermit, Shamrach bearing a light, and there lay —Archer Burlingam, embalmed. It was a shock, at first, even to Diamond Dick, Jr. But the hermit quickly explained. He had seen the fellow trying to escape, and had followed him. They had met in deadly combat, and the hermit, with vengeance to spur him on, had come off victor, though wounded. And this was the end. It was good news for the banker, Abram Warren, for now he could breathe freely, and knew that his troubles were at an end, so far as his foe was concerned.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had not forgotten his promised excursion with lovely Nellie Warren, and one day soon after the termination of the case they set out to visit the hermit at his home. But their visit was not a pleasurable one on reaching their destination, for the hermit was down sick and out of his mind. The young woman took a hasty look around, but was so concerned for the hermit that she urged an immediate return for the doctor. Haste was made, but when the doctor reached the sick man's bedside it was too late for him to be of service. And in another day Shamrach died, his secret with him. And then, by an accident, happened a strange thing. A man sent to watch the body that night by chance upset the lamp, and the numerous skins lying around took fire. And then a revelation, the preserved bodies burned almost like powder. The men there at the time barely escaped with their lives, so fierce and rapid were the flames, and in a few minutes the whole had been burned, and thus cremation was the final fate of David Shamrach. Even he himself, perhaps, had not known the inflammable properties of his embalming fluid.

(The End.)

The next number of the Diamond Dick, Jr., will contain "Diamond Dick's Dicker."

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